

Item 9

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1

Conference Room 1,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Tuesday,
21 November 2006

Time: 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor B. Hall (Chairman pro temp) and
Councillors Mrs. K. Conroy, Mrs. J. Croft, J.M. Khan, B. Meek, G. Morgan
and Mrs. E.M. Paylor

In Attendance: Councillors Mrs. B.A. Clare, Mrs. J. Gray, D.M. Hancock, J.E. Higgin,
J.P. Moran, A. Smith, T. Ward and J. Wayman J.P

Apologies: Councillors R.S. Fleming, A. Gray, K. Henderson, J.G. Huntington,
J.K. Piggott, G.W. Scott and Mrs. I. Jackson Smith

OSC(1).19/06 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members had no declarations of interests to submit.

OSC(1).20/06 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10th October 2006 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. (For copy see file of Minutes).

OSC(1).21/06 HALF YEARLY REPORT ON COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY CORPORATE COMPLAINTS STAFF

Consideration was given to a report of the Chief Executive outlining the complaints/issues received by the Corporate Customer Relations staff in the Chief Executives Department in the period 1st April 2006 to 30th September 2006. Figures were also provided for the period 1st April 2005 to 30th September 2005 to enable comparisons to be made. (For copy see file of Minutes).

It was reported that the number of complaints/issues dealt with by the Corporate Complaints staff had decreased from 561 in the first six months of 2005/06 to 394 in the same period in 2006/07. This was a decrease of 30%.

The report identified the number of complaints received within each service area and the nature of the complaint.

The main area of complaint related to services provided by the Housing Department. It was pointed out, however, that the total number of complaints about the services provided by the Housing Department had reduced from 297 to 153. The number of justified complaints had fallen from 74 to 16. This was a reduction of 78.38%.

There had also been a substantial decrease in the number of complaints about the maintenance service. The total number of justified complaints was equal to 0.08% of the total number of repairs completed in the six months April to September 2006.

Members were reminded that an additional £240,000 had been allocated for repairs to deal with a backlog of low priority repairs that had built up in 2005/06. These repairs had been programmed and undertaken as part of a planned maintenance scheme.

It was reported that although there had been an increase in the number of complaints about Housing Management, 39 complaints were from one tenant. Only 2 complaints, which related to the same incident, were found to be justified.

No justified complaints were made about housing improvements.

With regard to adaptations for the benefit of people with disabilities it was explained in the annual report for 2006 the Director of Housing had reviewed the service area and a number of actions to improve the services had been incorporated.

An additional £350,000 had been allocated for adaptations in the 2005/06 financial year to help clear the backlog which had built up. As a result no complaints had been made about adaptations for the benefit of people with disabilities in 2006/07.

Specific reference was made to complaints made against the Development Control section.

It was explained that although 8 complaints were made against the service, only one was found to be justified.

Members queried what remedial action was taken in cases where the Council failed to consult with appropriate residents on planning applications. It was pointed out that in cases where the Council had failed to consult compensation would be given.

It was explained that corporate complaints staff aimed to respond to 100% of complaints and enquiries within ten working days. It was reported that 98.9% had been achieved in the first half of the current year, compared with 99.3% in the first half of 2005/06. The average time to respond to an enquiry/complaint in the first half of the current year had improved to 1.6 days compared with 1.8 days in the first half of 2005/06.

The Committee was advised of the complaints procedure whereby complainants had the right to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman if they had exhausted the Borough's Complaints Procedure.

In the first six months of 2006/07 9 cases were investigated and decided by the Ombudsman. The Council was found not guilty of maladministration in any of these cases.

AGREED : That the half year report be received and the full year report for 2006/07 be prepared for consideration at a future meeting.

OSC(1).22/06 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW GROUP REPORT: SICKNESS MANAGEMENT

The Chairman of the Review Group presented the report of the Sickness Management Review Group, which had been established to investigate what the Council was doing in relation to the management and control of sickness absence and to determine what could be done in the future. (For copy see file of Minutes).

It was explained that the Review Group had gathered information and evidence through meetings, presentations by officers, analysis of responses to a questionnaire which had been issued to a sample of employees from all services within the Council, comparing experiences from Scrutiny reviews carried out by other local authorities, the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development Absence Management tools and a visit to a sickness management event at 3M, Newton Aycliffe.

The Review had focused on the following aspects: -

- Code of Practice and Procedures
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Performance Information
- Training
- Occupational Health

The conclusions and recommendations formulated by the Review Group for consideration by Cabinet were set out in the report.

Members queried whether levels of sickness absence varied between departments. It was explained that the Neighbourhood Services Department had higher levels of sickness absence as a result of the diversity of the department and the nature of the work that was carried out.

In response to a Member's question regarding trends in sickness absence it was explained that the main reasons for sickness absence were muscular skeletal problems and stress related illnesses.

The Council was taking preventive measures against stress related illnesses. Training had been arranged for all managers and stress management was being promoted through Occupational Health.

Members were informed that Occupational Health also provided a physiotherapy service.

RECOMMENDED: That the report and recommendations contained therein be submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

OSC(1).23/06 WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report of the Chairman of the Committee setting out the Committee's Work Programme for consideration and review. (For copy see file of Minutes).

It was pointed out that both the Review of Inform and Sickness Management were completed. Topics for future reviews therefore needed to be identified.

It was suggested that the Committee consider the success of the job evaluation exercise.

AGREED : 1. *That the Work Programme be noted.*

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Any person wishing to exercise the right of inspection, etc., in relation to these Minutes and associated papers should contact Mrs. L. Walker Tel 01388 816166 Ext 4237 email lwalker@sedgefield.gov.uk